

# 13 | JURASSIC TAMPERE & URBAN TOYIFICATION

**Mattia Thibault**

Faculty of Information Technology and Communication Sciences, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

Contact: [mattia.thibault@tuni.fi](mailto:mattia.thibault@tuni.fi)

## ABSTRACT

This short paper elaborates on the concept of urban toyification defined in the context of ludification as a subset of gamification. Different toyification strategies are outlined, focusing on the use of actual toys or toy aesthetics. Theoretical considerations are supported by the study of Jurassic Tampere, a urban toyification activity. A survey conducted by expert participants provided valuable feedback for possible future implementations.

## KEYWORDS

Toyification, city, public spaces, gamification, ludification.

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	Actual toys	Toy aesthetics
City Buildings		
Objects in the city		



## CONTEXT

Cities have always hosted various forms of play, in the private spaces of homes and schools as well as in the streets, parks and other public spaces. From fairs and carnivals to street sports, urban areas are often turned into playgrounds, putting side by side serious and playful activities. Some specific forms of play such as pervasive or location-based games such as Pokémon Go use this coexistence between a playful activity and a non-playful context as the fulcrum of their mechanics.

Nowadays, actions of urban gamification positioning playfulness at the heart of public spaces are often described as an antidote to the alienation of city environments caused by gentrification, to the anonymity brought by globalization and to the cold technocentrism of smart cities. Many important examples of urban gamification (such as pride parades, parkour or park(ing) day), as well as frameworks to describe and implement them (the ludic city [1], playable cities [2] or the Fun Theory by Volkswagen), insist on the potentials of urban play to help citizens reclaim their cities, reappropriate them.

## TARGETED ISSUE

There is a building consensus on the need to find new ways of helping citizens to engage in their cities and reclaim them. If the changes brought by globalization [3] and the ICT revolution [4] make citizens feel increasingly powerless and disconnected, the situation is even direr for lower classes, minorities and immigrants whose right to the city is often questioned by politics or gentrification. As urbanization progresses quickly (in Europe around 75% of the population lives in urban areas), there is a need for solutions that are economically, ecologically and socially sustainable.

ReClaim is a research project dedicated to exploring different ways of using playfulness and games to promote city reappropriations – that is, different strategies of urban gamification. Despite the growing interest around this topic, there is little or no work on the role that toys and objectual play could have in it. This presentation, then, aims to briefly explore the toyification of city spaces by drawing a typology of possible implementations and engaging in an actual project of urban gamification: Jurassic Tampere.

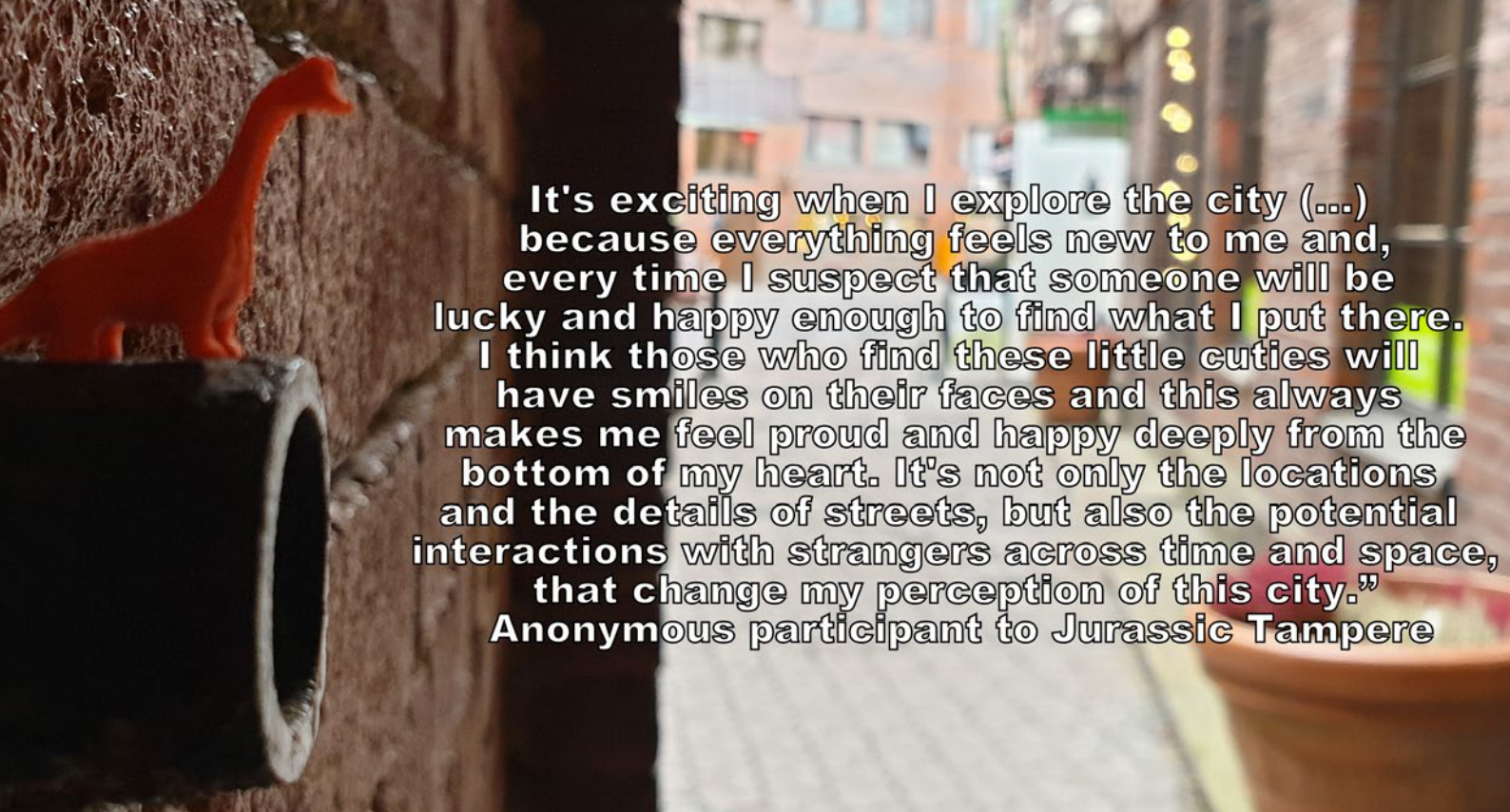
## PROPOSED SOLUTION

In this short paper we investigate how toyification can affect urban spaces. The term toyification, has only been defined recently [5]. It is part of a larger play-related cultural trend: ludicisation – a paradigm used to describe the increasingly relevant role of playfulness and games in our culture. Toyification communicates the idea of an entity being reinforced by toyish elements (an object, a character or a human being acquiring a toyish appearance, form or function through intentional behavior [6] and of toys finding their way in contexts that were traditionally excluded. If on the one hand many contemporary physical, digital and hybrid products demonstrate toyified tendencies (kitchen appliances, furniture, cars, mobile phones, and even food products such as cupcakes), on the other hand it is increasingly common to find toys displayed in office spaces and at funerals or used in higher education contexts. We can distinguish, therefore, between two forms of toyification:

1. A first one based on the application of a toy aesthetics (that is, having features such as small scale, colorfulness, lightness and safety) to non-toy objects in order to give them a playful feel.
2. A second one based on the use of actual toys in unexpected contexts that will, in turn, be reshaped by them.

*Using playfulness and games to promote city reappropriations*



A photograph of a red dinosaur toy placed on a ledge in an urban setting. The dinosaur is a long-necked, three-legged creature, possibly a Spinosaurus, standing on a dark, cylindrical object. The background is a blurred city street with buildings and lights.

**It's exciting when I explore the city (...) because everything feels new to me and, every time I suspect that someone will be lucky and happy enough to find what I put there. I think those who find these little cuties will have smiles on their faces and this always makes me feel proud and happy deeply from the bottom of my heart. It's not only the locations and the details of streets, but also the potential interactions with strangers across time and space, that change my perception of this city."**  
**Anonymous participant to Jurassic Tampere**

## RELEVANT INNOVATION

So, what will happen if we apply toyification strategies to the city? Cities are complex multi-layered entities and sophisticated semiotic devices [7]. Their structural heterogeneity makes it possible to adopt toyification strategies aiming at their different layers. Due to its objectual nature, we will engage especially the physical reality of public urban spaces and, in particular, we will focus on two possible areas of intervention: buildings and objects (with this generic name we refer to street furniture, statues, trees and other objects that can be found in urban spaces).

If we cross the toyification strategies with these two areas of intervention, then we outline four possible types of urban toyification:

- › Toy aesthetics applied to buildings (for example in the work of the architects Antoni Gaudí and Freddy Mamami, but also in the Lego Bridge in Wuppertal, Germany);
- › Toy aesthetics applied to objects (we can think of the Life-Sized Unicorn Gundam Statue in Tokyo, or the Red Army memorial in Sofia, Bulgaria, that was painted to make the soldiers look like US American heroes, including Superman, Santa Claus and Ronald McDonald);
- › Cities made of toys (such as theme parks like Legoland, but, in a way, also the replicas of Venice or of the Tour Eiffel adorning casinos in Las Vegas and Macau);
- › Toys placed in the city (as the mouse-scale buildings installed by Swedish art collective "Anonymouse", or several instances of toy photography).

## PROJECT OUTCOMES & RESULTS

Jurassic Tampere is an urban toyification activity that was carried out in Tampere, Finland in December 2019 in order to test some of assumptions regarding urban toyification. During the activity, a group of nine participants walked around the Tampere city center for three hours positioning in the public spaces 420 small rubber dinosaurs, taking pictures of the toys and observing the reactions of passersby. After the activity they answered a short open survey.

The main idea was that positioning toys in the city makes the environment look different: the objects around are re-scaled by the toys and new meanings can arise from their interpretations and interactions.

The survey results seem to indicate that the activity was successful. All respondents mentioned that during



Jurassic Tampere they started to notice minor details and gaps in the city, to observe people's abandoned things, to pay attention to the colors of the city (in relation with the colors of the toys) and to ongoing activities that are part of the urban diversity and dynamism. However, all respondents reported that the effects of Jurassic Tampere on their perception could not last more than a few weeks. Several participants also suggested that the activity could benefit from more structures, and could be made part of a game or a flash mob. Many respondents felt the desire to connect more directly with the people who collected the toys.

## CONCLUSION

Our short typology helped us to outline different forms of urban toyification and group under one concept a series of practices that are not always immediately recognizable as akin but that go under several different labels (play, street art, photography, artistic installations). The Jurassic Tampere survey, furthermore, underlines the potential of toys placed in city spaces, but also highlights the need to combine it with other more structured, gamification strategies.

## PERSPECTIVES & NEEDS

This is still an exploratory study. Future research should focus on the measurable effects of urban toyification in cities and what could be its possible synergies with other forms of gamification.

Future research should also enlarge the focus in order to include digital toys and digital cities, but, most importantly, digital extensions of real cities, so to investigate the potential of the toyification of the smart city too.

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